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Gunn, Clare.

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NOTES ON THE TEXAS GULF COAST
AS A TOURISM-RECREATION REGION

Prepared by

Dr. Clare Gunn

PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT
TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY

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NOTES ON THE TEXAS GULF COAST AS A TOURISM-RECREATION REGION

INTRODUCTION

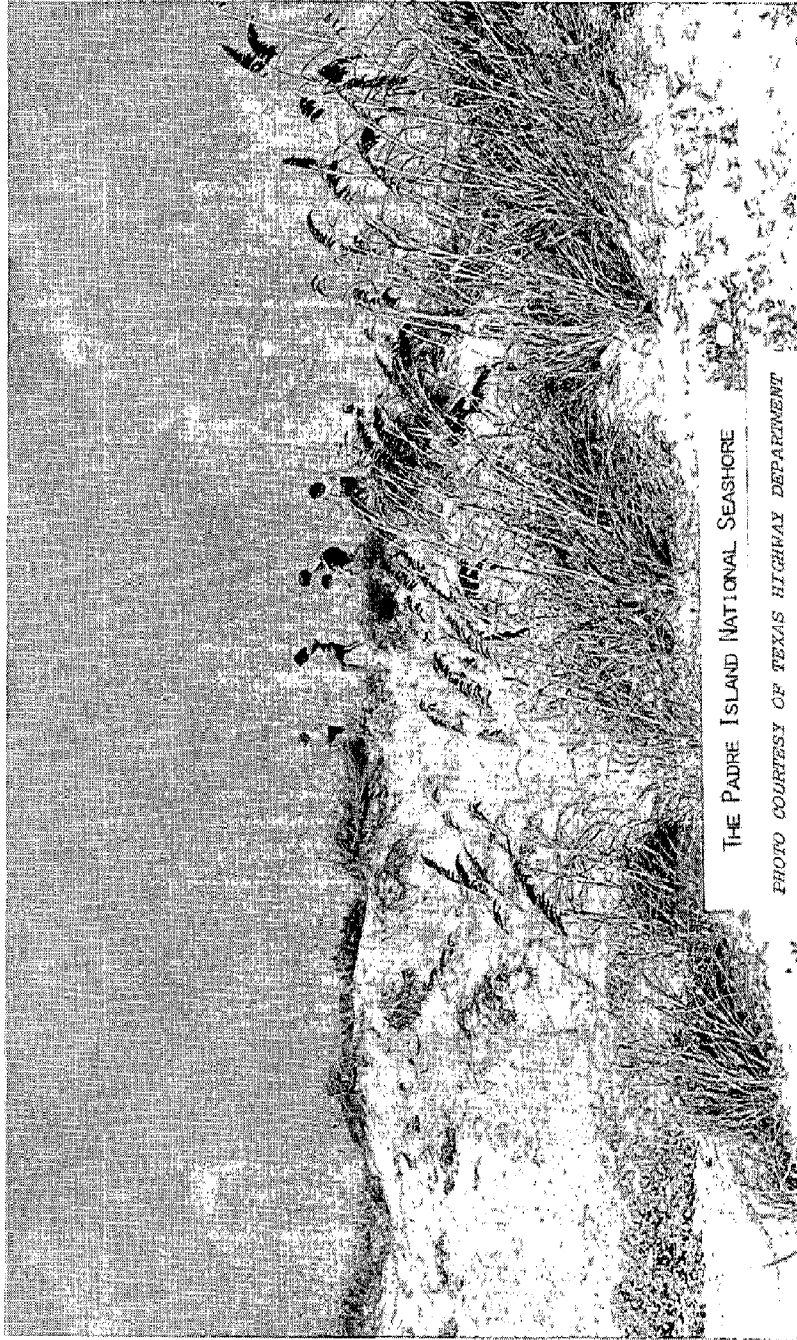
The purpose of this paper is to provide a cursory assessment of the present resource management of the Texas Gulf coast for tourism and recreation. Although tourism and recreation are not synonymous, both involve many of the same land resources, management systems, and groups of users. Both arise from similar factors of human behavior - *the desire to carry on pleasurable non-work activities near and away from home*. For purposes here, the binomial tourism-recreation is construed to include the full range of activity from the most active to the most passive, from the lowest-priced to the most costly, from those heavily natural resource-based to those mostly man-contrived, from indoor to outdoor, and from park and resource "conservation" to exploitation for profit.

Society now demands management of all coastal land for both short and long-range protection of the resource base at the same time it expects greater and greater opportunity for leisure use of the resources. It is no longer willing to accept the role of the terrestrial-marine interface as one great waste system that precludes many uses equally as vital to human life as industrialization.

In the past, tourism and recreation - just as was true of forestry and mining - were assumed to be "free goods," placed at our disposal by Nature for the taking. Items such as scenery, water, fish, mountains, and clean air were gifts and if an area had them it was blessed with opportunities to enjoy them; if not, it had no tourism or recreation.

Now we are recognizing that water, of and by itself, does not create recreation even though it may provide a base for recreation activities. Having a resource asset does not *automatically* provide for recreation any more than iron ore produces automobiles. Modern tourism and recreation are dependent upon the technology and managerial principles that will create the complexes that provide for the human experience sought by people at leisure. Thus, if the resources of a region, such as the Texas Gulf coast are to be husbanded adequately, sound policies of resource evaluation, protection and development must be formulated.

Nationally, there is nothing to suggest a lessening or even leveling of pressure for use of ocean coasts for recreation and tourism. One nationwide study projects an increase of "direct" ocean recreation



THE PADRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

activity occasions (swimming, fishing, boating, water skiing, surfing, skin diving) from 689 million in 1965 to 1,121 million in 1980. Many forces now contribute to the desire to make greater use of the Texas Gulf coast in the immediate and long-range future.

USER PRESSURE ON COASTAL RESOURCES

There are several reasons to believe that the coast will continue to be a *population growth* region. This trend is already clear for all coastal regions of the United States. The total population of the 18 counties along the Texas Gulf coast grew by 549,869 between 1960 and 1970, an increase of 23.6%. Increases in development of manufacturing, shipping, mining and tourism hold promise of continued growth of population. Others point to great growth due to processing imported ores.

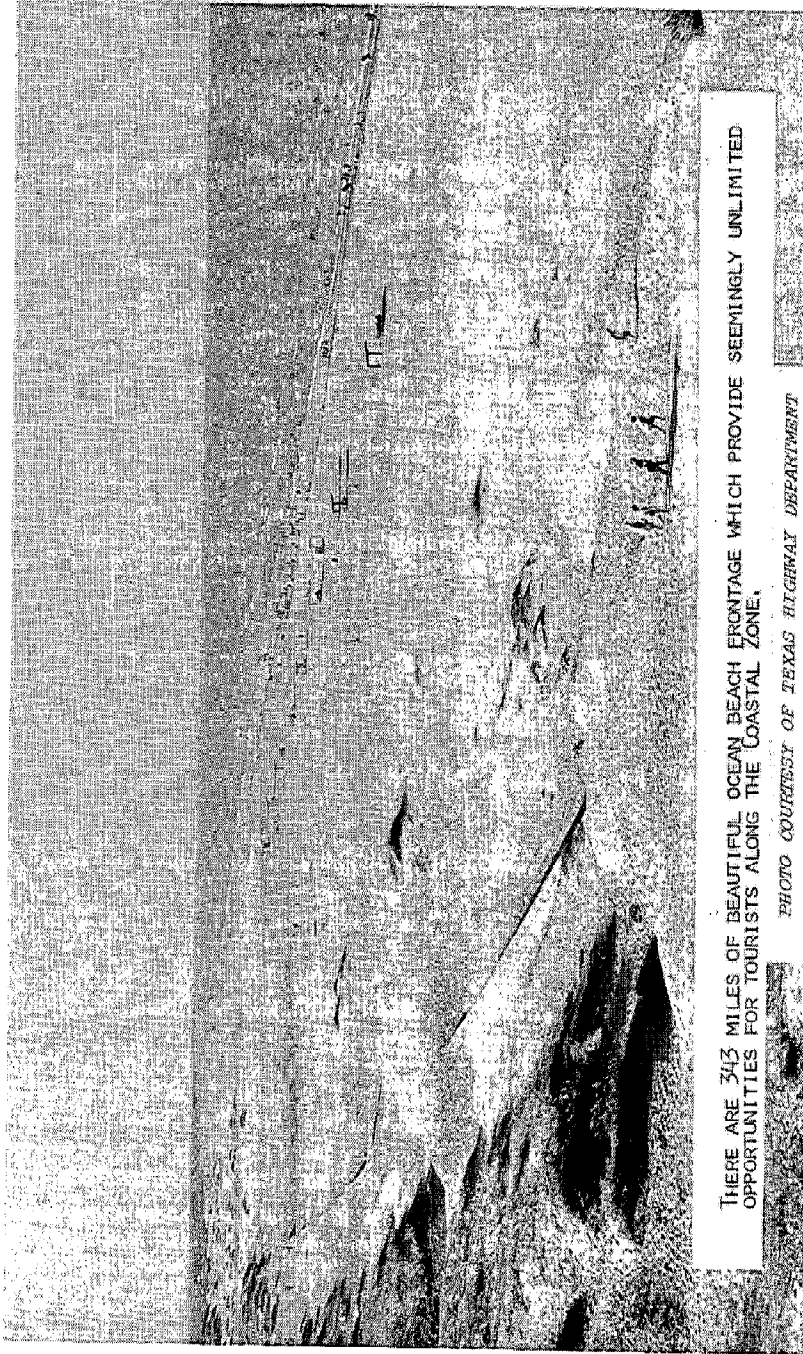
The development of more tourism and *recreation attractions* is increasing the lure of the region. Already complexes of vacation homes, theme parks, and public parks are being added to the volume of recreational opportunity. Future plans for the region include the installation of several new reservoirs. These will increase the attractiveness of the coast for recreational use, particularly for freshwater activities not now available.

The influential activities of promotion, advertising and publicity continue to increase. The Texas Tourist Development Agency has stepped up its national advertising; a new organization of attractions, The Discover Texas Association, has been formed; and the several coastal cities are increasing their promotional efforts. The publicity accompanying the formation of Padre Island National Seashore has already heightened the public's stepped up awareness of this national attraction.

Recently, there has been a slight increase in the use of *spring and fall* periods for recreational purposes. This may be a clue to greater use in the future as more people in less favorable climates learn of the generally pleasurable weather during these periods. As these vacation times are promoted, there may be even greater interest in the coast of Texas.

The *image and acceptability* of the South as a destination tourism-recreation region is improving, largely due to more widespread installation of air conditioning and the development of new lures, such as Astrodomain. As the interstate highway system is completed, access from populous regions beyond the coastal region will be made easier. In spite of the recent damaging effects of hurricanes, the attitude toward such natural hazards on the coast does not appear to be negative, as evidenced by the amount of reconstruction and continued growth.

It should be emphasized that these growth pressures are *concentrated in specific locales* rather than widely or evenly dispersed over the Texas Gulf coast. Geographically, recreational growth pressures appear to be following industrial and settlement growth - primarily at two focal points; the Houston-Galveston-Brazoria area and the



THERE ARE 343 MILES OF BEAUTIFUL OCEAN BEACH FRONTAGE WHICH PROVIDE SEEMINGLY UNLIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISTS ALONG THE COASTAL ZONE.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

Corpus Christi area. Other nodes are located at Brownsville, Port Lavaca, and Beaumont. Vast stretches of the Texas Gulf coast are yet "undeveloped" in the sense that few permanent structures or land improvements have been installed. Many of these counties actually lost population in the last decade.

A REGION IN TRANSITION

Following a long period of relative stagnation or even reduction in tourism-recreation development, several shifts are now appearing.

Both Corpus Christi and Galveston had at one time a number of large hotels catering primarily to resort destination use. This was comparable to the steamboat-railroad era of resorting in America popular in New York and the Great Lakes region. Although some of these remain, a new resorting expression is appearing as motel, motor inn, and vacation home developments along the coast.

Traditionally, the prime lure of the coast for recreation has been *fishing*. Although this continues to be the greatest use, there is a growing response from non-fishing activities: *surfing, beach lounging, camping, picnicking, shelling, and wildlife appreciation*.

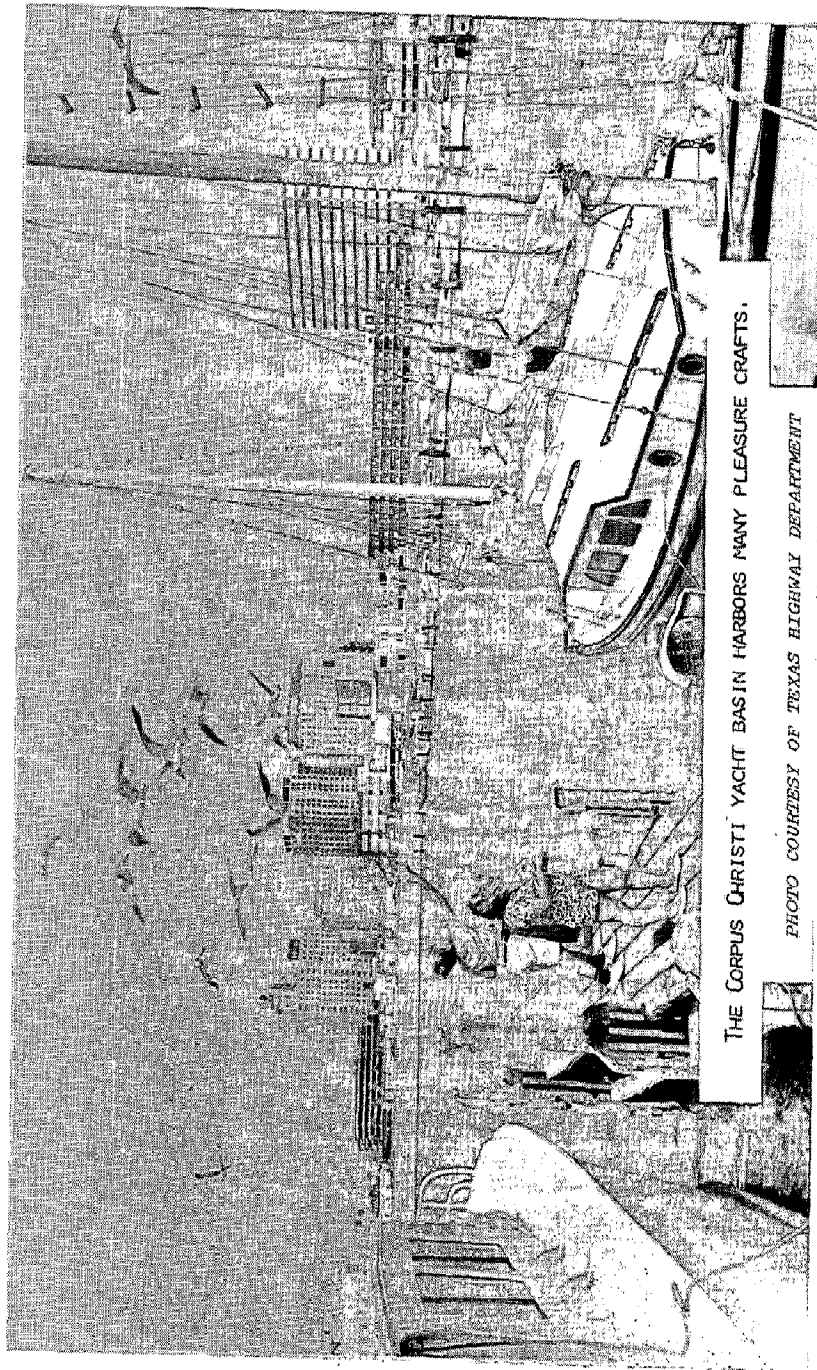
As water pollution, oil production, shell dredging and shipping increase, certain locations are experiencing drastic reduction in quality of resource and therefore quality of recreational experience. *Some localities are now denied any recreational experience at all.*

Gradually, there appears to be increased interest in clustered or packaged types of recreational developments. For example, the county parks, the National Seashore, the theme parks, and historic clusters are becoming more important offerings in the total supply of attractions. In fact, there is growing interest in man-organized and created attraction complexes (either natural resource-based or not) rather than undeveloped raw resources for recreation. For example, the Padre Island natural resources have been there a long time but did not have great visitation until the National Seashore was identified, publicized, managed, and provided with auto access, trails, services and facilities, even though they are now only a fraction of the total planned development.

Internal coastal social changes must be recognized. As minority groups (particularly Latin and Negro) gain status, they become greater participants of recreational areas. This results in some shifts and stratification of use in some of the established recreational areas, especially in city parks.

THE NATURE OF COASTAL RECREATION

If coastal recreation is to be understood, two questions must be dealt with:



THE CORPUS CHRISTI YACHT BASIN HARBORS MANY PLEASURE CRAFTS.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

What is unique about coastal recreation generally?

How does the Texas Gulf coast compare with others?

Coastal recreation may be classified three ways: (1) exclusively coastal, (2) general water-oriented, and (3) other. Coastal recreation is like none other by virtue of the land-sea amalgam. The land edge against a major water body represents a special leisure activity base. Here one can participate in such exclusively seacoast activities as surfing, skin diving, underwater exploration, spearfishing, beach-combing, coastal lounging and swimming, coastal hunting, coastal fishing, and general coastal aesthetic appreciation.

Although it has not been documented, it would appear that the latter is a major reason for seeking out coastal areas for recreation. Obtaining the long vistas, watching for ocean-going vessels, feeling the ocean breezes, contemplating the historic past and legends of the sea, and possibly seeing porpoises or whales on the horizon are some of the lures of seacoast recreation. These are not possible along inland waters.

In addition, coastal waters (including the bays and estuaries) frequently provide many of the same recreational opportunities as do other water bodies: swimming, boating, motor-boating, sailing, canoeing, waterskiing, and fishing. Because these are not exclusively coastal, they can take place on waters near or somewhat distant from the seashore. For example, wherever a new reservoir is built, it may provide these activities as well as (or better than) the seashore.

It must also be recognized that a coastal region can and often does support many of the same kinds of recreational activity as elsewhere, such as hiking, sunning, bird watching, horseback riding, picnicking, camping, photography, sketching, painting, sightseeing (scenic, scientific, historical), and nature study (biological, geological, botanical) as well as many indoor activities, such as nightlife, conventioning, visiting friends and relatives, vacation home use, indoor sports, theater and many other urban-oriented leisure activities.

THE TEXAS GULF COAST

The basic natural resource characteristics for exclusive coastal recreational activities are abundant along the Gulf Coast of Texas. Waterfront resources generally are of a quality that would support lounging, beachcombing, and general aesthetic appreciation. Although the topographic, vegetative, aquatic, climatic, and wildlife factors are not spectacular (as compared to other U. S. or world coasts) they are of sufficient quality to offer a reasonable degree of recreational satisfactions when so developed. For populations within Texas and nearby states who are unable to travel to exotic coasts, the Texas Gulf coast represents the only seacoast available to them.



DUCK HUNTERS NORMALLY GET THEIR LIMIT THROUGHOUT THE COASTAL ZONE.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

Hunting, fishing and contact marine recreation activities, such as skin diving, underwater exploration, spearfishing and swimming would be possible along much of the coast, bays and estuaries with some notable exceptions. In portions of Galveston Bay, for example, the water quality is so poor that none of these recreational activities can take place.

Extensive stretches of the seacoast consist of such gradual changes in elevation and such finely divided soils that they are mud flats or wetlands for most of the year. These regions are poorly suited to many recreational developments but are well adapted to wild-life types of recreation. Those recreational activities not demanding shoreline resource assets are supported by much of the coastal lands and are already developed to some extent.

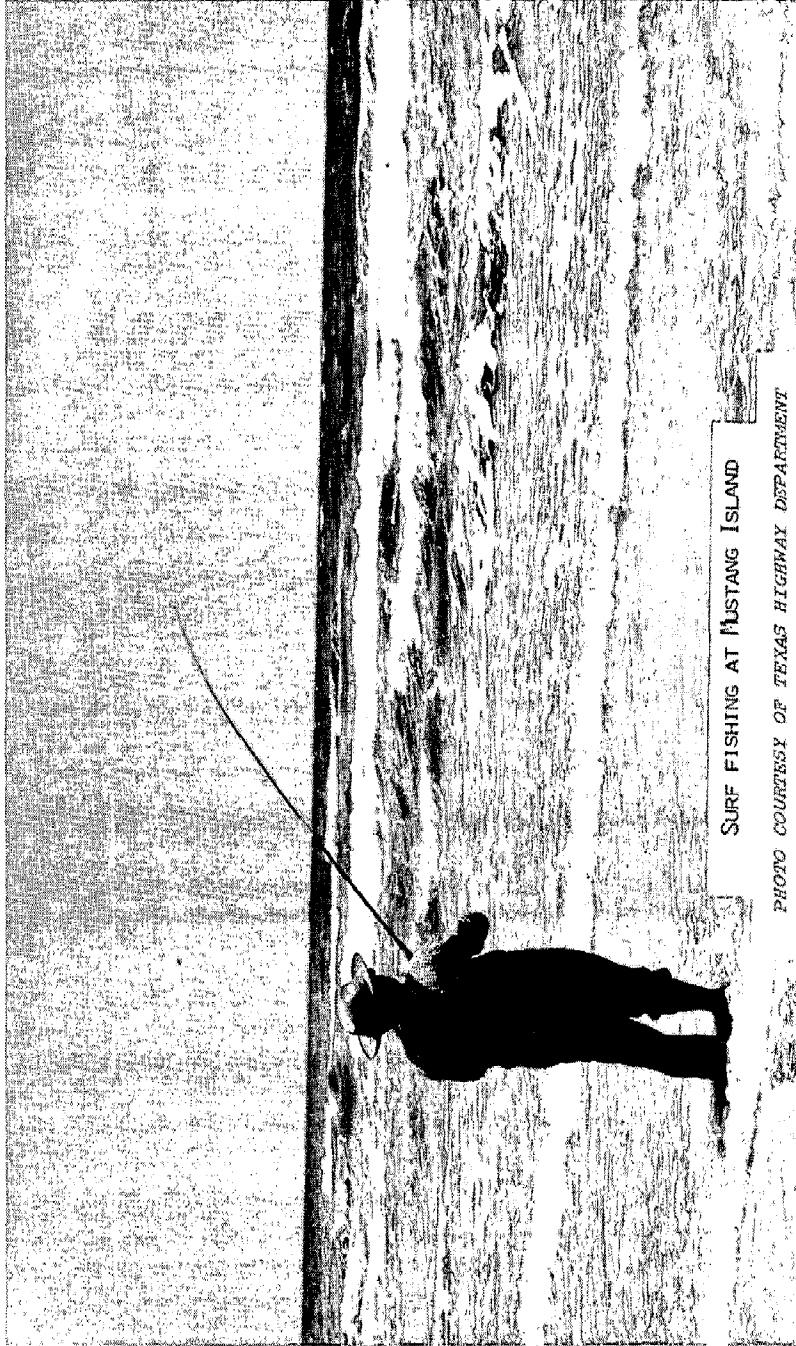
On the whole, one can engage in several types of recreational activity if he seeks it out. The total economic significance of investments, trade, and employment oriented to recreational coastal activities is substantial when one considers the public lands, recreation-oriented roads, vacation homes, motels, hotels, restaurants, and marine facilities.

Actually, the unifying characteristics of the Texas Gulf coast as an overall region are weak compared to the strength of subregional entities. The dominant characteristic of the sea provides linkage throughout but historically, economically, and socially, this soon breaks down into segments, generally oriented along river watersheds. The linkage between ocean, bay, estuary, port, port city, river system, and the watershed with its special topographic, climatic, and vegetative characteristics is stronger than is the lateral linkage paralleling the coast. Therefore, any assessment of the Gulf Coast of Texas must recognize the strength of water-based fingers reaching from the coast into the hinterland.

RECREATION AND TOURISM PROBLEMS

Because no major objective study of the Texas Gulf coast has been made to properly assess the limitations or problems of tourism or recreation to date, the following is subject to revision and correction as new information is found. There appears to be a number of situations today that suggest the need for detailed scrutiny of the region to ameliorate or eliminate some of its tourism-recreation difficulties. It is obvious that much is needed to guide the onslaught of growth in this field.

1. *The variety of activities now available appears to be extremely low.* The simpler and more natural-resource oriented activities such as sports, fishing and boating have dominated to date. At many coastal areas it is difficult to find development that allows nature interpretation, industrial tours, recreation vehicle camps, resorts, water-oriented tours, scenic drives, trails, visiting historic sites, obtaining entertainment, and high quality food service and lodging.



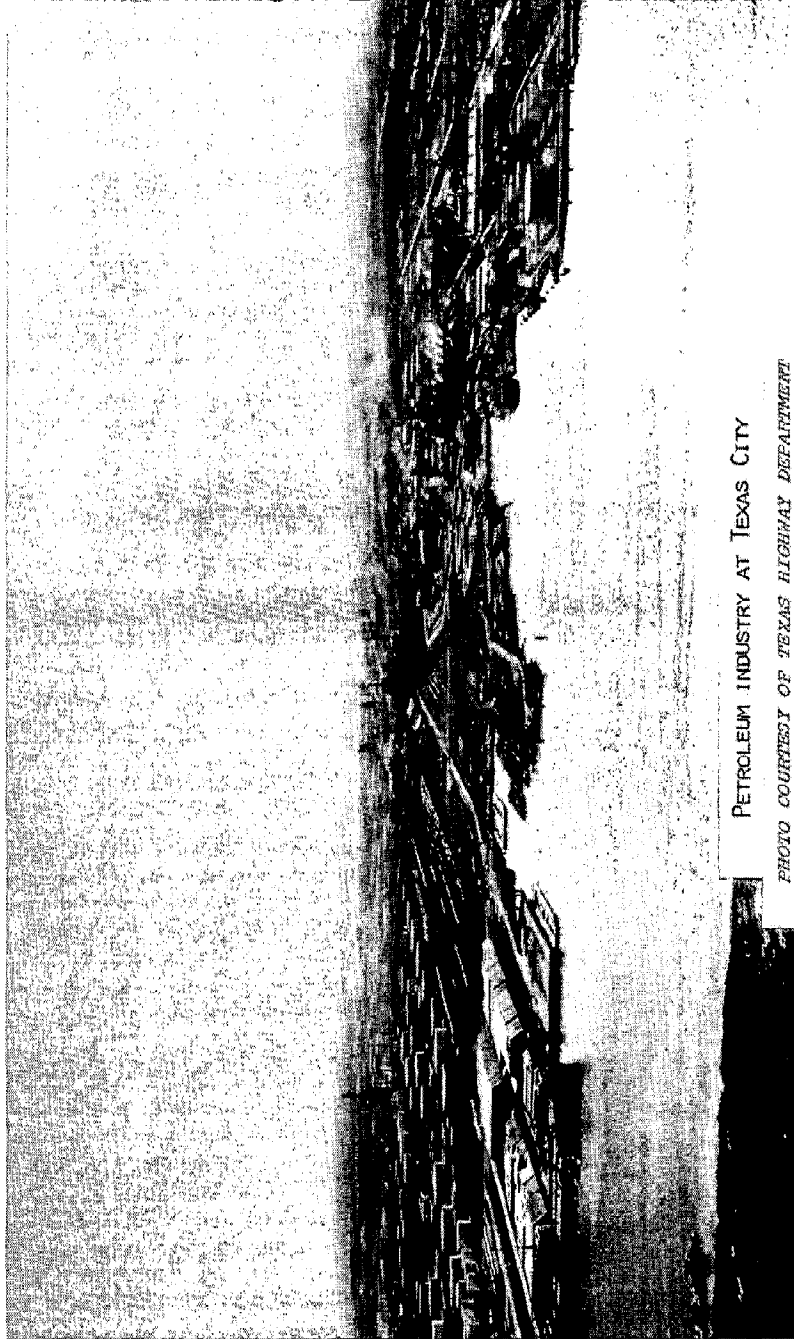
SURF FISHING AT MUSTANG ISLAND

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

2. *Generally, where the resource quality has degenerated the most, the demand for recreation-tourism activity is greatest. The demand is concentrated in the very place where other demands - manufacturing, shipping, oil drilling, dredging - are increasing pollution both of water and of air. And resource degradation is increasing. In other words, one cannot assume that the great length of the coast and the abundance of shoreline resources are necessarily of equal strength in supporting development and use.*
3. *Because there has been no concerted effort toward relating population centers (either coastal or outside) with the coastal resources for tourism-recreation, transportation and access are difficult. The relatively few public parks and commercial facilities (resorts, motels, marinas) make it difficult for a person to find access to the basic natural resources, particularly the waterfront. One assumption has been misleading - that of "open beach." Prevalent is the fallacy that allowing promiscuous driving and multiple use along the beach is solving access. In affect, the development of a shoreline thoroughfare creates serious internal conflict among those who wish to enjoy the waterfront.*
4. *There is little evidence that plans for development have been integrated between separate decision-makers. Therefore, the juxtaposition of development tends to be chaotic, lacking in functional relationship, and aesthetically cluttered. This characteristic of course, occurs dominantly in those areas of the more intense development. But, even in some of the more sparsely developed locations this lack of functional interrelationship is also true. The application of good planning, good site design, good structural design and good management is limited rather than widespread.*
5. *There is evidence that no overall guidelines are available to accept the new growth which is inevitably on its way. If the difficulties of resource erosion and lack of tourism-recreation functionalism are to be corrected and if the opportunities offered by the remaining undeveloped resource base are to be tapped, some overall direction and order must be developed. This is no criticism of present planning forces or those who have already declared an interest in better development of the coast. It is merely a statement of need above and beyond the present effort, particularly directed toward tourism and recreation interests.*

SPECIAL STUDY NEEDS

The above review of the situation reveals need for certain special information and insight in order to protect the future valuable resource assets of the unique Texas Gulf coast and assure their wise management for tourism and recreational uses. At least the following four are important at this time.



PETROLEUM INDUSTRY AT TEXAS CITY

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

1. *Assessment of Tourism-Recreation Management Roles*

Today, a multiplicity of owners-managers-developers control the use of lands throughout the Texas Gulf coast region. Little is known about their policies and practices. Needed is a cataloging and critical review of the many private, public, and non-profit organizations and their management of the present lands and physical plant for leisure use. Only with such data can any overall plans be laid for improvement of the present management. Only with such data can the voids, overlapping, and duplication of management be understood. Only with this information can long-range policies toward resource conservation and protection be developed.

2. *Evaluation of the Potential of the Resource Base*

Needed is an evaluation of the natural and cultural resource base of the Texas Gulf coast for tourism-recreation purposes. A great variety of environmental factors are important to recreation activity. The extent to which these exist on the Texas Gulf Coast has not been determined.

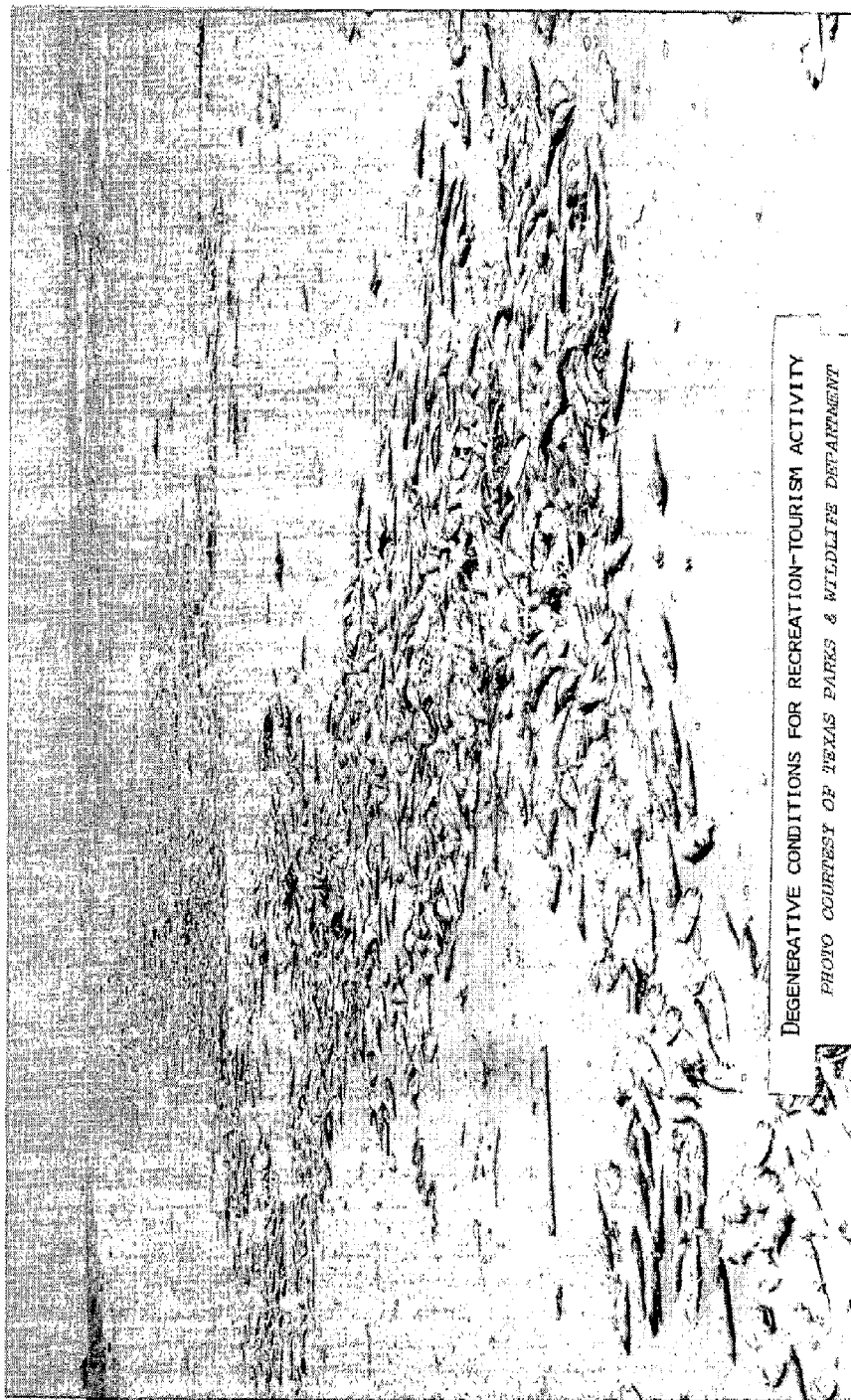
Such a study would provide the foundation for future planning, both by public agencies and by private enterprise. It would not produce a plan but the basis for planning. Such a foundation would identify locations where resource assets clustering, according to tourism-recreation purpose, might suggest strong or weak support. Following this, it would be possible for owner-developers (public as well as private) to prepare individual project feasibilities.

3. *Location of Areas of Critical Need: Protection, Redevelopment*

Because present development of the resource base is not homogeneous, there now exist two types of areas in most critical need for action; those that have not yet been developed and may be of critical value in the future and those that already have reached crisis proportions of resource abuse.

No critical review of the coast has been made to identify those lands that now need to be held from scattered and intensive development in order for them to be available in the future or to maintain a reasonable balance with intensive development. Whether or not such lands are now in public or private hands and the nature of slated development should be determined.

More than emotion is needed to identify clearly those lands (defined to include air, water and land resources) that now



DEGENERATIVE CONDITIONS FOR RECREATION-TOURISM ACTIVITY

PHOTO COURTESY OF TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

have reached crisis proportions of resource degradation. A qualitative measure should be applied to rank and locate the most critical areas so that this evaluation can be placed against others for future management planning.

4. *Interrelationships and Social Costs of Alternatives*

Just now we are beginning to recognize the social costs of specific investment and utilization of resources. It is now becoming clear that the disposition of waste products of manufacturing, for example, is a social cost above and beyond that now included in the balance sheets of manufacturing accounting.

Proposed is the examination of pilot sites and locations and the development of models that identify the external as well as internal costs of several likely alternative and interrelated land uses. This type of calculation can be applied to recreational and touristic uses as well as to agriculture or manufacturing. This device can then be used to evaluate alternative sites for alternative uses as well as alternative uses of the same site.

From such a study could be derived an economic base for making changes in controls and management of land uses along the Texas Gulf coast.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief examination of recreation and tourism along the Texas Gulf coast indicates that these uses are tightly intermixed with other uses of the basic resource assets of the region. There is some homogeneity along the coast because of its relationship with the sea. Other factors, however, support development and management policies that are along subregional watershed lines, running perpendicularly to the coast.

The present level of investment in facilities and services along the coast for tourism and recreation indicate that there is still a chance of redevelopment and restoration as well as new planning that can increase greatly both the quantity and the quality of human experience at leisure. This involves a dedication to reconstruction and guided growth that may not yet exist in the region or at the state level. As a beginning step toward gaining greater foundations and understandings, a minimum of four studies are recommended at the present time: assessment of present management roles; evaluation of the potential of resource base; identification of locations of critical need; and an assessment of land use alternatives as related to social costs.

It should be clear that resource abuse is no longer tolerable and that this coastal region has long ago reached the turning point. If quality settlement for local residents is to continue and if quality experience for visitors is to be attained, new management policies for tourism and recreation must be exercised and soon.

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